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The Seymour Brochure



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Seymour

Brochure

The Seymour Brochure



9978-339



BOOKPLATES

from the designs
of
RALPH FLETCHER SEYMOUR



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June 15, 1900
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Books are the faithful re-
corders of the beliefs philosophies & dreams
of past ages : where, like
honey-laden bees,
congregate the
thoughts of the
present

RALPH
FLETCHER
SEYMOUR



Ralph Fletcher Seymour



queer old world we live in holds but few results that have been achieved through logical trains of circumstance. The early training and environment of Scott, Burns, Lamb and Whittier might be considered anything but a reasonable preparation for the life work each was to undertake. And surely we would not deliberately lay a foundation of leather and shoe pegs, as did Bunyan, for so wonderful a superstructure as "Pilgrim's Progress."

The book-plates of Ralph Fletcher Seymour are not, however, less interesting because they

are a quite natural development from his career. This may be said to have really begun when he joined the staff of designers of a large engraving house in Chicago, for it was here what had been more or less indefinite inclinations began to crystalize upon the core of practical experience which he was acquiring.

With Mr. Seymour's work as a Book-plate artist in view, only a brief glance is permissible at what is really the principal work he has undertaken, the making of books.

From an interest in the work of the old world scribes the artist quite naturally dropped into hand lettering and illuminating the text of various literary tid bits. These produced in limited editions with careful attention to securing classic form as to paper, binding, decorations and other details.

Led by his connection with the engraving house to an appreciation of the practical side of book making, a font of type was next designed by Mr. Seymour. This being cast, he proceeded to demonstrate the fact—woefully in need of such demonstration.—that modern mechanical methods can be applied to the production of books, that shall have all the charm of those delightful reminders of the past that we are wont to consider the classics

of the Art Preservative of all other arts.

With this larger field of effort we are concerned only because it affords a key to much of the artist's book-plate work and because, having created many beautiful books, no one could be better qualified to add what is truly the finishing touch to every book—the plate that denotes final ownership.

It is quite evident, from the examples before us that the work of those early clerks who penned page after page of their vellum-bound tomes has strongly influenced their latest disciple. It is equally evident, however, that the vital germ of this influence is not being simply reproduced—as a seed in the soil that can only propagate life but add nothing to it— but that Mr. Seymour, with delicate and loving appreciation of all that is best in the old, is giving also much that is himself.

The most sincere compliment that can be paid is the half understood feeling, as one looks over the following pages, that the plates are almost out of place anywhere but within the covers of some fine book.

“Bookishness” best, if only lamely expresses their charm—they suggest books, fine books—and they appeal most strongly to those true lovers of books, who can derive quiet enjoy-

ment merely from being among their treasures.

The advantage Mr. Seymour possesses of a practical knowledge of drawing for the various reproductive processes lends additional interest to his designs, because his originals have lost nothing save size in their transformation into printed book-plates. Each line and tone has been applied with the camera's viewpoint as a guiding influence. The result is plates of mechanical as well as artistic excellence.

Indeed, complete mastery of all the practical details is as characteristic of his work as is a remarkably fine perception of those far more intangible graces and harmonies that produce beautiful designs. Doubtless, too, the same practicalness is responsible in some measure for the fact that Mr. Seymour's book-plates are wholesomely free from any tendency toward exaggeration or "faddishness." This, in an age in which we quickly run to extremes of every fancy—and back again—is a refreshing trait.

Two examples—the plates for Preston A. Perry and Lawrence Motley Viles—show the artist to be equally happy in expressing himself in line or masses of color, and the Ralph Fletcher Seymour plate reproduced in photogravure offers a still greater variety to the

critically inclined. Among the designs, however, there is somewhat of a preponderance of those in line, and they are so pleasing in character that this might reasonably be said to be Mr. Seymour's especial field—though without prejudice to the other mediums in which the artist works.

With the examples pretty evenly divided between symbolic pictorial and decorative styles in design, and with clever combinations of these in many cases, there is wide range for personal preference to enter into an "appreciation."

With the greater work of book-making in its entirety in view, however, it is very apparent that Mr. Seymour is strongly inclined toward those forms of design that apply more especially to book decoration.

In the Perry plate with its border of appropriate verse, there is a nice combination of bookishness and decorativeness. It is splendidly proportioned, the color values are admirably maintained and the grace in line and detail is such as can be commanded only by a master hand. The strong, firm lines in which the central panel is executed, suggest an old wood cut and the balance of color and form is excellent.

In the Seymour plate with the tree and tor-

toise this same heavy line style is used in combination with a background of solid black and the result is equally pleasing.

In the Frank E. Lord and Laurence B. Dixon plates the choice of symbolic units with reference to the quotations used is decidedly apt and they have been combined in the designs with great skill.

In the matter of typography, Mr Seymour quite naturally achieved a degree of perfection that is really exceptional. That he should be considered an authority on typography and lettering is but the willing tribute we pay to the long study and laborious practice with which he has devoted himself to these subjects. Following in the footsteps of those devoted men whose lives were spent in transcribing and preserving in suitable form, the thoughts of the great minds of former ages, Mr. Seymour acquired a wide knowledge of the various forms of letter used both before and since movable types were invented.

Restrained by eminent good taste, artistic sense and practical training, he has avoided producing unpleasant eccentricities in style, while creating type forms of decided individuality.

In the present day many presses are confin-

ing themselves in book work to the use of types of standard Roman or Antique form, or to fonts cut with but slight variation in character therefrom, and the results show a vast improvement over the mass of mediocre or positively atrocious productions of a few years back.

In his book-plate work, however, Mr. Seymour very properly takes greater latitude and has created many forms adapted from classical standards. Perfect taste and a keen sense of the fitness of things characterizes the use of each style—harmonizing the lettering with the decorative portions of the design of which it forms a part.

The chief charm of all well executed hand lettering lies in its freedom from the stiffness of cast types and in this particular the work before us is more than ordinarily pleasing, for despite an appearance almost, of carelessness in the formation of letters there is nowhere an awkward or jarring line.

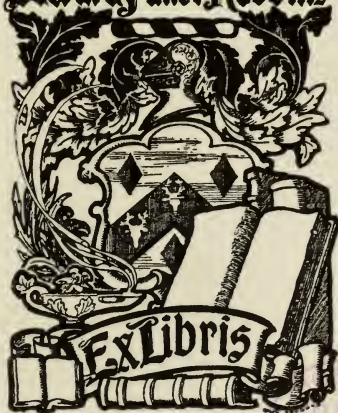
A book lover before and above all else—next a creator of books because of his enjoyment in the task—and lastly a designer of book-plates, we hail Ralph Fletcher Seymour as an exponent of the consistent and logical development of an ideal, and we wish him all

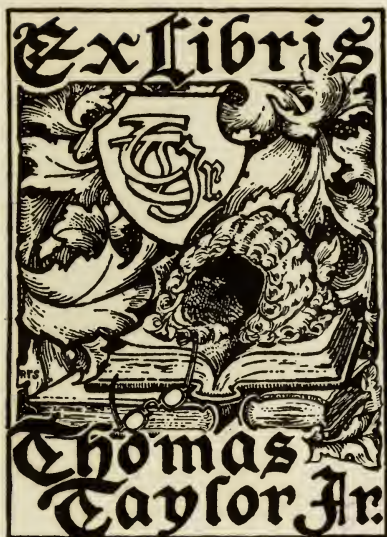
the pleasant things the craft holds for its earnest devotees.

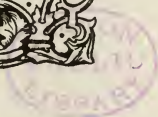


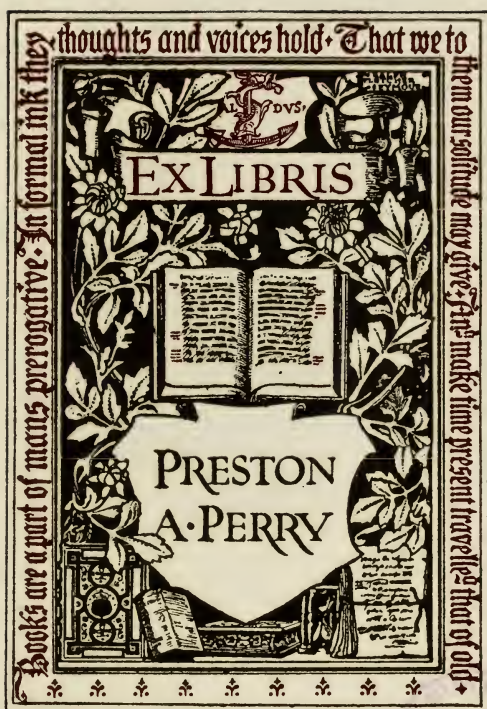


Edward Fuller Robbins

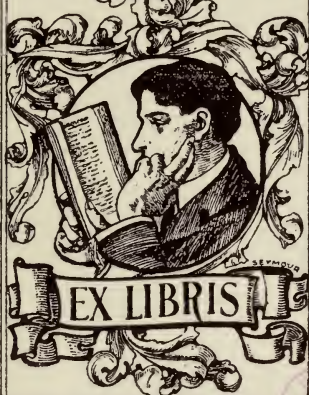








LAWRENCE MOTLEY
VILES

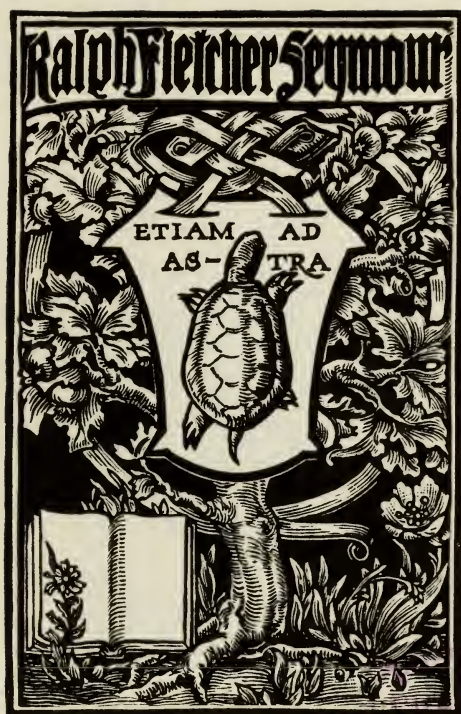


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